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President: Mr. Essy . . . . . (Côte d'Ivoire)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 95

Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family

International Conference on Families

The President *(interpretation from French)*: This morning, the General Assembly, in accordance with the decision taken at its 3rd plenary meeting and pursuant to its resolution 47/237 of 20 September 1993, will hold, under agenda item 95, the first of the plenary meetings devoted to the implementation of the follow-up to the International Year of the Family, to be designated as the International Conference on Families.

I am pleased to welcome participants to this International Conference on Families.

In particular, it is my pleasure to extend a warm welcome to the many Ministers and other senior policy-makers who have travelled from their respective capitals to participate in this Conference. Their attendance is a most fitting response to the decision of the General Assembly last year that this Conference should take place at an appropriate global policy-making level. Their presence today, just as this event itself does, is a tribute to families throughout the world and a testimony to the importance and high priority that the global community attaches to families and to family issues in the process of sustainable development.

The International Conference on Families is taking place at a time when humanity is facing a defining moment for its common future. So too is the United Nations. The realities, opportunities and challenges facing human civilization today present a vastly different picture than in the last decade. Almost all spheres of human endeavour have been affected by this development — not simply the basic aspects of daily life at the level of the individual, of the family as the basic social unit, of the community and national society, but also the global community of nations in the broader socio-political spectrum.

As a result, the United Nations has begun to elaborate an increasingly refined and effective conceptual base in order to cope with today's realities in our endeavours in various spheres. We are on the verge of crystallizing a development process centred on the human being, one that would integrate the various spheres of human activity into an interrelated but coherent whole and that would include as its basic elements peace, sustainable economic growth, environment, social justice, democracy and good governance.

Numerous recent events and initiatives have greatly contributed to this evolutionary process in their respective spheres and have played a significant role to this end. The same will be true of other, forthcoming events, such as the World Summit for Social Development.

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By proclaiming 1994 the International Year of the Family, the General Assembly acknowledged the significant role that another essential element of society — the families as the basic social unit — could play in the context of this process.

Consequently, for the first time in history, the Assembly also focused special attention on families as a subject of social action, since it is both an agent and a beneficiary of the development process and is advantageously positioned at the crux of various problems affecting various social groups and sectors of activity.

As my predecessor stated last year when the Assembly held a special meeting to launch the International Year of the Family, the basic notion of the importance of families to society at all levels was laid at the foundation of the creation of our United Nations.

However, just as other socio-political institutions throughout the world have been undergoing profound transformations, particularly in recent years, the family, which is the most fundamental of social institutions, has also undergone great upheavals in an age that also gives it new opportunities and unprecedented challenges.

On the one hand, present-day socio-political realities have heightened the importance and responsibilities of families and have made their role even more vital. They also reinforce the essential function of families in the building of a just civil society and in our global efforts for peace and sustainable development. Faced, however, with recent changes outside the family and the profound parallel transformations in families themselves, the response of families has varied from successful adaptation to total breakdown.

On the other hand, one often sees negative behaviour and exploitation within the family. These are tolerated precisely because of the intimate nature of family relationships, and because of them all family members cannot enjoy their individual rights on an equal footing. Hence, families as democratic social units remain an ideal that does not correspond entirely to reality. This takes on added significance because the family can be the foundation for the well-being of individuals, societies and nations only when it is founded on principles of equality, the inviolability and equality of the rights and responsibilities of the individual, whether male or female, mutual respect, love and tolerance.

Clearly, the current state of the world's families is a vital factor that can influence the pace of social progress and development. It is essential that society, without delay, support families in meeting their needs and fulfilling their functions, that it foster further positive changes within families and that it reinforce the role of the family as the fundamental place of learning and of the exercise of values, rights, responsibilities and democracy.

As the International Conference on Families opens, the international community is fast approaching the completion of the first phase of its important efforts to give the family greater consideration. In proclaiming the International Year of the Family, the General Assembly set as one of its main objectives an increased awareness, among both policy makers and the general public, of the unique role played by families. Great strides have been made in fulfilling this objective. The Year has made it possible to make the subject of the family an essential component of the concept of development and of international dialogue on that issue.

There is no doubt that the Year has made it possible to redefine some fundamental concepts related to the family. For example, it has been acknowledged that social policies must respond to holistic, family-centred principles; that many of the crucial problems facing families and States, however diverse they might be, are manifested in the same way in all regions and all countries; that the Year is only the first step in a long process of support for families; and that international cooperation is essential in dealing with family-related issues.

We have also seen that an especially constructive approach to family-related problems has come about in the course of the Year. There has been a consistent effort to ensure that the activities of the Year at all levels be characterized, first, by recognition of the diversity of family life and the principle of pluralism in the functioning of families; secondly, by emphasis on gender equality in society and the family; and, thirdly, the major importance attached to the rights of children. As a result, there is a growing awareness of the absolute indispensability of addressing family-related issues and bringing about positive changes in families, because this is essential for the achievement of significant and sustainable progress in the global effort on behalf of women, children and other disadvantaged members of society.

Considering the manner in which, over the space of just a few years, and thanks to the assiduous efforts devoted to it, the Year has grown from a small bud into full maturity, one cannot but conclude that the basic strategy for the Year has been effectively carried out through the concerted efforts of the international community, in harmony with a large number of partners playing a crucial role. Evidence of this includes the active involvement of some 150 Member States, national authorities at the highest level, numerous organs of the United Nations and of other intergovernmental organizations, hundreds of national and international non-governmental organizations, academic communities, the private sector and thousands of enthusiastic volunteers all over the world. The decision to focus the Year's activities at the national and local levels has also contributed much to the success of the Year, since it has been effectively supported by numerous regional and global measures, such as the four regional preparatory meetings and the world Non-Governmental Organization Forum launching the Year. The resources mobilized through the Voluntary Fund for the Year, as well as through in-kind contributions, have proven to be vital. The various phases of the observances of the Year have also included well-conceived promotional and public-information strategies and activities. But all this is just a beginning. The hard work of mobilizing energies and striving for more sustained activities still lies ahead of us.

I wish to pay a well-deserved tribute to our numerous partners in the International Year of the Family for their effective action and their financial and in-kind contributions. Both the preparatory phase and the observance of the Year have been orchestrated by the secretariat of the Year, which has effectively played the roles of catalyst, promoter and coordinator of national and international efforts.

Allow me also to express, on behalf of the Assembly, deepest gratitude to the Secretary-General and warmest congratulations on his outstanding work in this area, taking particular account of the technical complexities of the subject, the chronic lack of resources and the fact that the secretariat of the Year is one of the smallest units ever charged with the global coordination of an international event of this magnitude. We must welcome this example of good management of resources and rationalization of work.

The successes achieved by the International Year of the Family, impressive as they already are, also set high standards for this Conference. Last year the Assembly decided to devote the Conference to the implementation of the follow-up activities to the Year. Through deliberations with regard to the Year, Member States should be able to articulate even more solid principles on which to base our future action for the family. We should provide a clear direction for such action and begin to mark out its modalities and priorities. The General Assembly has requested that the secretariat submit a draft plan of action on the family at the Assembly's fiftieth session, and our deliberations should also be a very useful instrument in the accomplishment of that task.

In short, this Conference should set the stage for action to be taken in the long term. The task is an extremely difficult one, but we owe our best effort to all the families of the world.

I now call on the Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who wishes to address the General Assembly at this time.

The Secretary-General: Five years ago, the General Assembly decided that 1994 was to be the International Year of the Family.

At the time, there was no consensus. Some did not see the point of an International Year of the Family. Opinions were divided as to what the Year was about. Some people argued that support for the family discriminates against those who prefer to live outside family units. There were also disagreements over the activities which should be organized to mark the year.

And so, in my speech last December to launch this International Year, I urged that we concentrate on practical outcomes: the Year should result in concrete measures to strengthen the situation of the family around the world.

Today I can report that a great deal of practical action is indeed being taken, and more is planned. But I can also report that in one key respect this International Year of the Family has already exceeded expectations.

The International Year of the Family has stimulated a worldwide debate. Many political notions have been clarified. Out of the process of debate and reflection have come new insights.

Instead of confusion and hesitation, there is now consensus about the role of the family in human society. Today, a new realism prevails. It is accepted that the family is a fundamental institution of human society.

Indeed, it is established that society is a structure made up of families and individuals related to society, in the first instance, through families.

Views may differ about what an ideal family should be like -indeed, families themselves vary greatly. But there can be no doubt as to the importance of the family. Like the State, the nation and this world Organization itself, the family is a living, functioning organism, which has to cope with the many profound changes which are occurring in the world.

It has also been recognized that families have many needs and that in many societies families are under stress. They face serious economic and social difficulties. Families should therefore receive the full protection and support of society and the State -going well beyond broad statements of principle. Families need tangible assistance through policies, programmes and services.

It is clear that all areas of social policy affect families. But families also need support. Policies should therefore be made sensitive to the situation of families. The aim must be to empower families to fulfil all their roles and functions in society.

The debate about the role of the family has coincided with the process of rethinking the role of the United Nations in development. The two have overlapped, and, as a result, it is now generally accepted that action to support families is an important component of the development effort generally.

This new awareness of the centrality of families to development issues has vast implications. Families are major actors in and beneficiaries of the sustainable development process. Without the participation of families in the development process, it cannot succeed. As producers and as educators, families play a significant role in human development. In these and in many other ways, families are the primary mechanisms through which the human community achieves its ends.

Families are universally recognized as important actors in education. Their role in health cannot be disputed. They are the building blocks of communities and cities. The importance of families for the well-being and development of children is a point of long-standing, universal consensus. The decisions taken in families are at the centre of such questions as population growth, economic development and environmental protection. Behaviour and attitudes in families crucially influence approaches to gender equality.

Families provide an integrated focus for many development problems. A focus on families helps to build bridges between disciplines, policy sectors and professions. It shows clearly how different development issues are interconnected. It provides a mechanism for coherent action at the basic level of human life.

Families also provide an operational approach to the integration of human rights into the conduct of everyday life. The family is the first and primary conduit for human rights education. Our roles in society and in public life are formed as children in families. Children raised in a family where tolerance and gender equality are practised will have the best human rights education. The experience of fairness and social justice provides the best assurance that these values will be sought in the greater society.

The International Year has been productive in another sense. It has shown that the international community can mobilize action at the grass-roots level and find unity of purpose in a pluralistic world. The Year of the Family is proof of a new political will and a new capacity for solving global problems through the basic units of society.

Intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations have rallied to support the Year. They have begun long-term processes of benefit to families. The hallmark of the Year has been the involvement of the full spectrum of professional groups. The Year has also drawn guidance from an array of disciplines. It has been an initiative built on partnership. Its strength testifies to the power of a family focus. Its global appeal derives from the universal significance of families to the human experience.

Through the International Year of the Family — from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the World Conference on Human Rights and the International Conference on Population and Development — new insights, new principles and a new vision are emerging.

Next year we observe the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations. The year 1995 will also see the World Summit for Social Development and the World Conference on Women at Beijing. This will be a time for

reflection and thinking, especially about development issues.

The challenge now is to ensure that the momentum gained in the course of the preparation and observance of the Year is maintained. Mechanisms for future action are already in place. National coordinating bodies have been a catalytic force in mobilizing action in countries all around the world. Some Governments have acted already. Some have set up ministries with a specific mandate for family policy.

From its heights to its most basic level the human family must be united in its dedication to a sustainable future for all people. The International Year of the Family has provided a starting-point.

Looking back over the past few years it now seems extraordinary that the importance of the family as a human institution should ever have been regarded as controversial. But it is now clear that there has been a geological change in political attitudes.

Today, it is recognized that the family is a key institution in the social structure of every human society. Indeed, precisely because of its importance, opinions differed as to the role, function and future of the family. Today, in a new spirit of pragmatism, the world is acknowledging the importance of families. Allow me, therefore, to conclude with a statement attributed to Confucius, who wrote:

> "When there is love in the marriage, there is harmony in the home; when there is harmony in the home, there is contentment in the community; when there is contentment in the community, there is prosperity in the nation; when there is prosperity in the nation, there is peace in the world."

The United Nations will honour the many accomplishments of the Year. The United Nations will continue to support families at the international level.

The President *(interpretation from French):* I thank the Secretary-General of the United Nations for his statement.

Before calling on the next speaker, I should like to propose that the list of speakers at the International Conference on Families be closed today at 11 a.m.

It was so decided.

The President *(interpretation from French):* I therefore request those representatives wishing to participate in the International Conference on Families to inscribe their names on the list as soon as possible.

I now call upon Her Excellency Dr. Amal Osman, Minister of Social Insurance and Social Affairs of Egypt.

Mrs. Osman (Egypt) *(interpretation from Arabic):* General Assembly resolution 44/82 of 1989, which designated 1994 as the International Year of the Family, reflected awareness of the fact that the family is the principal underpinning of society and the foundation of its development and progress. The United Nations and its specialized agencies have played a pioneering role in protecting and supporting the family and in mobilizing international cooperation in its support in the economic, social, cultural and public health areas. The United Nation's international conferences have highlighted the role of the family and adopted international strategies and programmes of action whose aim has been the strengthening of the moral foundations of the family and the enhancement of its economic capabilities.

The Cairo International Conference on Population and Development, the latest of those conferences, stressed the role of the family with its Programme of Action, which was adopted by unprecedented consensus. The Programme underscored the need to strengthen the capabilities of women and the importance of their empowerment and integration in the programmes of comprehensive development and focused on the importance of education, health, culture and other services that are needed to promote the family at the social and economic levels. Chapter V of the Programme of Action also stressed the role and rights of the family as the nucleus of society and the foundation of its progress and development.

Non-governmental organizations such as the International Union of Family Organizations have undertaken ambitious projects at the international, regional and local levels to prepare for the International Year of the Family. Egypt has played an active part in all the activities relating to the International Year. We have participated in the Cyprus Conference in 1991 on the social rights of families, the 1992 Conference in Poland on the legal rights of the family and the 1992 Brazil Conference on the economic rights of the family, and, in 1993, we were happy to host a conference on the cultural rights of the family in Cairo under the chairmanship of Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak, the President's wife.

We in Egypt have taken special interest in this event and in all the activities relating to it. We have not been content to use it merely as an occasion for exchanging cultural exchanges or information training, but have made it a concrete tangible reality that would impact on each and every family in every Egyptian city, village and governorate through the establishment of the Advisory Committee on the Family which I have had the honour of chairing. The Committee, which had among its members a number of experts and specialists in all areas relating to the family, was concerned with the formulation of policies and strategies at the national level. A number of technical subcommittees at the local level have been entrusted with the local implementation of such policies and strategies.

I do not intend to speak at length of our successes in this field, but I should like to focus on two of them.

The first success was in the social-security area. We have expanded the social-security umbrella to cover every Egyptian citizen, whether he or she works inside or outside the country, and thus we have guaranteed for the Egyptian family its present and future security. This year, the number of those who benefit from this direct type of insurance has risen, as at 30 June 1994 to 15.9 million. In the past financial year 5.4 million Egyptian pounds were paid out in pensions and compensations to nearly 6.7 million people. These legislative and other specific measures are evidence of the emphasis we lay on the need to protect the individual, the family and society, without distinction between men and women, against the hardships and hazards of old age, disability, death of the breadwinner, work-place injuries, unemployment, pregnancy and child birth. Among the most important schemes of insurance coverage are the following:

— Social-security insurance has been expanded. This insurance covers government, public and private sector workers under the provisions of law 79 of 1975. On 13 June 1994, the number of those insured under the scheme was almost 9 million.

— Social-security insurance covering employers and such categories under law 108 of 1977 now covers nearly 503,000 according to the figures of the past financial year.

— Social-security insurance covering Egyptians working abroad under law 51 of 1978 now covers 54,000 persons.

— Social-security insurance covering street vendors and seasonal workers in agriculture, fishing, domestic services and other areas under law 112 of 1980 now covers nearly 5.4 million citizens.

Our other success to which I should like to refer concerns productive families. This is a means of integrated development that aims at transforming the family unit into a productive unit capable of adapting to economic and social changes through redoubling the family's financial skills and capabilities. The project now applies to 900,000 families, with a waiting list of 1 million families which want to join the scheme.

We in Egypt can pride ourselves today on our success in developing our disposable potential local and environmental resources and turning them into end products with added economic value. We have succeeded in steering social conduct towards individual and family awareness of the social value of productive behaviour. In addition, we have managed to preserve authentic Egyptian crafts and industries while developing the types, components and raw materials of their products. Proof of the success of this endeavour can be seen in 34 permanent exhibitions of family products. Such exhibitions have been organized also in Europe, in Africa and, more recently, in Latin America.

In his statement to the General Assembly at the current session Egypt's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Amr Moussa, emphasized the importance we attach to social development and its universality and to the promotion of the role of the United Nations in this field. He also stressed that we should like to see the social dimension given priority in international life. Proceeding from this, we shall take part in the preparatory activities for international conferences which will address social issues.

I should like to refer in particular to the World Summit on Social Development, the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements. The Copenhagen Summit will deal with the struggle against the three-pronged problem of poverty, unemployment and social integration. The Beijing Summit will be aimed at enabling women, who constitute 50 per cent of society, to enjoy their rights and to increase their skills in the interests of progress and peace. The Istanbul Conference will be aimed at improving circumstances relating to human settlements. Special attention will be paid to the vulnerable sectors of society, beginning with women.

Those Conferences are all links in the long and wider context of social development in its fullest meaning. Such development can be achieved only through the development of the family and the strengthening of its foundations. The family, no matter how it may be viewed culturally, is a constant of social organization, an enduring institutional reality and a productive economic unit. That being the case, all Governments and international, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations should protect and promote that unit.

As the purpose of this debate is to support and consolidate international cooperation with the aim of developing and promoting the role of the family, we are required to set up an international programme of action with clear objectives, that would lend itself to division into short-term and long-term stages. Such a plan of action should be formulated in a manner that would ensure acceptance and participation by all governments, individuals and international and national organizations under the umbrella of the United Nations and its Economic and Social Council with all its subsidiary organs.

Economic, political and cultural changes throughout the world have impacted directly on the everyday life of the family and will affect its prospects in the near and distant future. That being the case, it is unthinkable that we should try to bring about the emergence of tomorrow's world and to ensure and consolidate balance in international political and economic relations without making the nucleus of stability and balance — namely, the family, the starting point of our endeavours. That is to say, the protection of the family and the preservation of its enduring cultural and material components is our collective responsibility at the local, national and international levels. It is undeniable that, in this respect, governments have a direct responsibility and an increasingly important role to play.

Given the international interest in the family, we must take concrete and serious action at the international level. States and donor organizations — especially the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and other financial institutions — must provide the wherewithal to strengthen the productive capacity of families in a manner that would be commensurate with the requirements of economic restructuring in certain societies and with the challenges of the free market economy in other societies. Governments must act as good conductors that ensure the swift transfer of international technological and financial assistance to their societies. Non-governmental organizations are required to strengthen the decentralization of national and international action on behalf of the family and through the family.

From this rostrum, we call once again for a formula of cooperation that would lead to peace, progress and prosperity for the international community as a whole — without distinction between cultures, regimes or levels of wealth — in the interests of the social peace, progress and prosperity of the basic nucleus of society, namely, the family.

The President *(interpretation from French):* I call now on the representative of Uruguay, Mrs. Burmester de Maynard, Director of the National Institute for the Family and Women.

Mrs. Burmester de Maynard (Uruguay) *(interpretation from Spanish):* From the very beginning of its history as a nation, Uruguay has demonstrated a firm commitment to social issues, a commitment which has shaped our concerns and actions. Initially, our actions were focused on strong State intervention, based on the notion of social policies as an integrating factor. That type of intervention, characterized by a virtual State monopoly on the supplying of social services, was designed more to consolidate a common identity as a mechanism for ensuring equal opportunity than to achieve uniform results as a strategy for combating poverty.

Because of the characteristics of Uruguayan society at that time, "positive discrimination" — to use a contemporary term — was not thought to be an effective way of making opportunities available to the masses, or of ensuring equal treatment and uniform results. From a legislative standpoint, since the beginning of this century Uruguay has made significant social progress in the realms of labour, politics and civil rights. I shall now endeavour to describe recent years' progress in the elaboration of family-service policies.

In that connection, the thrust of my Government's efforts has been fourfold:

First, in 1991, we established under the aegis of the Ministry of Education and Culture, the National Institute for the Family and Women to administer Government policies in that sphere. The creation of that Institute has had a strong impact on society as a whole. The Institute's permanent status and the resources allocated to it attest to my Government's commitment.

Secondly, in April 1994, with a view to lending permanence, continuity and consistency, rather than mere political change, to the relevant public policies, the Government of Uruguay established the National Commission on the Family. Its pluralistic membership includes eminent experts and in this first year of management the Commission is already demonstrating its ability to come up with proposals on concrete issues affecting families and, therefore, each and every Uruguayan.

Those proposals — or institutional options — involve intervention at various levels; they reflect a new relationship between society and the State. They are geared to providing families with better social services, thanks to institutional coordination and the support of the entire State apparatus.

The Government of Uruguay has committed itself to Uruguayan families, to each of every one of their members, laying special emphasis on the most vulnerable sectors of the population: women, children, adolescents and the aged. Uruguay has a high life expectancy; senior citizens are thus among our target groups. In order to maximize our social services, we seek the input of all recipient groups by providing them with a forum in which to voice their expectations, needs and demands.

To that end, in 1990, the Government adopted a national plan of action for social policies, with governmental experts and the private sector joining together in a pluralistic and participatory framework. We have also established a comprehensive and integrated programme of social policies, based mainly on labour, cultural and educational guidelines, to deal with the difficulties faced by families in adapting to the rapid changes and deep transformations affecting them.

The National Institute for the Family and Women and the National Commission for the Family are part of a comprehensive policy aimed at maximizing the efficiency of our social service apparatus. They were created not to compete institutionally with the traditional public policy administrators, which would make them redundant, but to enhance public policy by integrating its various dimensions — the family, gender and the State — and by coordinating existing programmes and tailoring education, health, employment and social security policies to the specific requirements of each sector of the population, with particular emphasis on the family.

Prince Sisowath Sirirath (Cambodia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

To ensure that maximum benefit accrues to the target group, programmes have been planned, designed, executed, implemented and evaluated based on thorough research and on an analysis of the dynamics of the family unit.

Thirdly, within the scope of the Office for Planning and Budget and under the aegis of the Presidency of the Republic, a new mechanism — a social infrastructure programme — has been created. One of its tasks is to fine-tune social policies so as to ensure optimum results. It also serves as a think-tank for the analysis and formulation of policies pertaining to food, education and health.

These three organs have demonstrated an innovative approach to social policies and made the priority needs of families — in particular, families which are socially the most vulnerable — the subject of decision-making at the highest levels of government.

A fourth avenue of coordination has surely been the Social Cabinet, established in 1991 and composed of experts in social legislation. A national plan of action, submitted by the National Institute for the Family and Women, was adopted by the Social Cabinet in May 1992. The plan embraced six main categories: education, health, employment, human rights, legislation and the environment. Each category has specific programmes. There being as many as 40, I shall not enumerate them.

The six main categories, in turn, have eight interrelated programmes of action covering high-risk priority items to be dealt with in the five-year period which began in May 1992.These include: women and families suffering critical poverty; children in particularly difficult situations; teen-age mothers; rural women and families; the elderly; families and gender; the disabled; and victims of domestic violence.

Six operational programmes complete the plan: the establishment of offices in the various regions of the country, information centres to publicize the rights of women and the family, specialized libraries, activity rooms and databases. Most important of all, though, is our training programme, which allows us to make use of our human resources. Given the fact that we have this type of cross-sectoral policy, this has become the most important tool at our disposal.

Two and a half years after its adoption the plan is 75 per cent operative, with 34 specific programmes under way. Those programmes include: the opening of information centres throughout the country; measures to combat domestic violence, which already have had a profound impact on families; the establishment of a Centre for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Assistance to its Victims; the training of public officials, and of personnel for the police, emergency medical services and the Centre for the Prevention of Domestic Violence; the creation of a hospice for the victims of violence; research and an interactive radio programme; measures to combat child prostitution; the promotion of coeducation and non-sexist education; public awareness and advocacy, covering more than 23,000 direct beneficiaries and 960 indirect beneficiaries.

Programmes on the following topics are still in the research-and-analysis stage: job placement; rural women and families; teen-age mothers; heads of household; and intergenerational poverty.

That prompts the following remarks on the family.

If we continue to accept the present discrepancy between the actual and the ideal, we shall be sending a mixed message to children and adolescents, as well as to adults, that will only reinforce stereotypes, impose rigid models and, therefore, undermine the accepted concept of the family.

If families today continue to aspire to unrealistic goals, it will gradually destroy the basic structure of social relations, the family; it would clearly be a step backwards. The stereotype of the traditional family — in which the man is the breadwinner, or at least the principal provider — is being eroded by the growing acceptance of unconventional, more open and, therefore, less stable relationships. That instability often results in the absence of an adequate role model for the children.

Much has been written about the need to define the role of the family in society. Current changes in society — notably the participation of women in the public sector and in the labour market — are transforming the family. But why not approach the problem and transform the world from the perspective of the family?

On the day when the National Commission for the Family was established, the President of the Commission, Mrs. Maria Julia Pou de Lacalle, and wife of the President of the Republic, issued this challenge: Let us not allow the family to become the prisoner of changes in society. Let the family decide what changes it wants in society.

That challenge implies pro-active families — families that take responsibility for their actions — families that shape events rather than yield passively to them — families that contribute to society with all their vigour and with all the wisdom derived from their heterogeneity. Let that be our challenge.

We have just come from Cairo, where we contributed our perspectives and our vision; onward now to the social Summit in Beijing. Let us transform society: the private sector, the public sector, the family. Let us build a world that will include and recognize each and every one of us — a world in which we recognize ourselves — a world to which we feel we belong, where men and women, young and old, can begin to reassess their relationships, their roles, their attitudes towards decision-making and towards access to and control over resources. Let us be realistic: Goals that are not based on reality are, by definition, mere aspirations; they cannot be achieved.

With support by its relevant institutions, the Government of Uruguay has commemorated this International Year of the Family with deeds and achievements. We hail the initiative of the United Nations in proclaiming 1994 the International Year of the Family and in holding this International Conference on Families, which will enable us to have a fruitful and enriching exchange.

These conclaves allow us to renew our strength and reaffirm our commitment to the family, which is uppermost in our minds and in our daily actions. Our great challenge is to adapt family structures and dynamics so that the family becomes an agent for change. By strengthening the family we shall be strengthening society itself. Indeed, by giving priority to human values idealism and sharing, we shall be ensuring our very future.

Let me conclude by quoting a great contemporary Uruguayan poet, Graciela Genta de Fernandez, who has always struck a receptive chord in us and in the words of another contemporary poet, Sylvia Puentes de Oyenard, given us time to live and to dream. In these few lines from one of her celebrated poems she reflects upon the world, freedom, openness, spontaneity, frontiers, and the obstacles that divide us; she gives us a new sense of hope and creativity and lends a new dimension to life, to

commitment and to love. Our policies must always be inspired by those values.

> "I wish to leave you a world of doves in flight, of open paths, of children's smiles, a world without frontiers, of brotherhood, where the word 'friend' means something. I wish to leave you a world of hopes and dreams, a vast horizon that is never empty."

The President: I now call on the Permanent Representative of Turkey, Mr. Batu.

Mr. Batu (Turkey): I have the honour and pleasure of speaking today on agenda item 95, the follow-up of the International Year of the Family, which has been observed by this Organization to underline the meaning of the family as a fundamental unit of society.

I should like to take this opportunity to submit some information regarding the preparatory process for this event in Turkey, which is clearly an expression of the broad interest of our people and Government in this initiative.

Ongoing economic and social changes around the globe with transcending human effects have an enormous impact on the family as an institutionand its members. At a time when we have been living through an era of radical change, I believe the proclamation of the International Year of the Family has been a timely and appropriate occasion in order to reflect the moral values preserved by the family and the vital functions it fulfils. It has also been a useful opportunity for the international community to demonstrate its commitment to the role of the family in all walks of life.

The family is the fundamental source of social well-being and the stability of society. At the same time it is a force for progress in so far as we, as universal human society, succeed in promoting its dynamic structure by effectively furthering its social, legal and economic rights as a whole and the rights of its members as human beings. Only then will we be able to strengthen the dynamic potential of the family to reproduce its functions. Protecting the family and enhancing its role in society can only be attained by taking into consideration all aspects thus paving the way for the prosperity and well-being of future generations.

It is in this spirit that my country has approached the International Year of the Family and celebrated it with the following activities.

The reports on overall activities concerning the International Year of the Family prepared by the specialized commissions that had been established by the National Committee, were disseminated and presented in a book. Furthermore, nine different research programmes on various aspects of family problems have been completed in cooperation with the universities, and three of these have been published by the Turkish Family Research Institution. That non-governmental organization also launched this year the *Family and Society Magazine*, which is being published on a regular basis.

Various educational programmes were carried out in cooperation with the Turkish National Broadcasting Company. Numerous informative announcements and 40 drama series examining Turkish family life were broadcast on our television. Thousands of posters, as well as other promotional material displaying information and emblems of the International Year of the Family, were distributed throughout the country to enhance public awareness.

In order to focus the attention of our society on this event new practical means have been used. In this context National Lottery tickets with the International Year of the Family logo printed on them were presented to the public on 9 May. In addition, low-income families with newborn babies are being supplied with an educational audio cassette series in collaboration with maternity hospitals. Envelopes and stamps have been printed by the General Directorate of Postal Services with the logo and slogans of International Family Day.

In order to spread the meaning of the 1994 International Year of the Family throughout the country, instructions were given to provincial governors requesting the wide dissemination of the information on the objectives and principles of the event.

International Family Day, 15 May, was celebrated in our capital with the participation of various social organizations and non-governmental organizations, while in several other cities entertainment programmes were organized and performed.

Meanwhile, activities with regard to the formation of the Second Family Council have begun. Additional television dramas on family life are being prepared, some of them with the cooperation of the Ministry of Culture. Several projects for Family Week, 10 to 16 October 1994, have been organized, and the fourth issue of

Family and Society magazine will be a special issue dedicated to the International Year of the Family.

In summary, I am happy to note that the International Year of the Family has provided a valuable opportunity for us to increase the level of awareness on the part of policy-making mechanisms at the local and the national level and to reassess our legislation with the aim of clarifying its potential impact on families. It has further encouraged us to explore new horizons for the promotion and protection of the family.

In conclusion, I would like to extend our best wishes for the full success of the International Year of the Family. I am confident that the Year will constitute an important basis for activities in the social field and on human rights matters in the future, carrying us into the twenty-first century. The observance of the Year will also be a significant prelude to important events such as the World Summit for Social Development and the fourth World Conference on Women, the work of which will directly concern the family as an institution and all its members as individuals.

The President *(interpretation from French):* I now call on Her Excellency, Mrs. Nebiha Gueddana, President and Director General of the National Office of Family and Population of Tunisia.

Ms. Gueddana (Tunisia) *(interpretation from Arabic):* I am grateful for this opportunity to address the Assembly. I have the honour today, near the end of the International Year of the Family, to present on behalf of the Republic of Tunisia an overview of our experience in the area of family policy, and to explain why Tunisia has chosen to address its various aspects.

Since the early days of independence, in 1956, Tunisian family policy has been characterized by coherence and comprehensiveness. It focused on all members of the family at the legislative, economic, social, cultural and educational levels. The intention was to preserve the family unit and ensure its prosperity in order for it to be able to positively interact with society — and continue to be its principal nucleus.

In order for us to achieve that end, it was necessary to set up an appropriate legislative and legal framework which would make it possible to translate into concrete reality the options Tunisia elected earlier. The start was the promulgation in 1956 of the Personal Statute Code, which laid down the solid foundations of family relationships within the Tunisian family, on the basis of mutual respect between man and wife, of shared responsibility, and of guaranteed rights of both parties, while taking into account the interests and well-being of children.

This involved the prohibition of polygamy, the raising of the marriage age to 17 years for girls and to 20 years for boys, the regulation of divorce, and the adoption of measures that ensure the co-equality of the parents with respect to child custody.

The Personal Statute Code has been amended already on five occasions. The major and more significant amendment has been embodied in the measures approved, in August 1992, by His Excellency the President of the Republic with a view to reaffirming Tunisia's determination to protect the family, ensure its unity, and guarantee the interests of its members.

The reforms I speak of, side by side with the Personal Statute Code, encompassed the penal, labour and nationality codes. This empowered Tunisian mothers to confer their nationality upon their children from foreign husbands, with the agreement of the husband. The reforms introduced more stringent punishment for husband or wife in cases of domestic violence, and created maintenance-allowance funds to guarantee an income for divorced women and their offspring. These and other bold, well-thought-out measures demonstrate how Tunisia has approached this issue by invoking both the precepts of Islam and the needs of a democratic and open civil society.

In the course of 1994, the International Year of the Family, Tunisia has translated these last measures into concrete reality, and has set up the structures and machinery necessary for their full implementation so that they may produce the desired results. Moreover, many government bodies and voluntary organizations have organized important events and waged information campaigns to familiarize the public with these measures, to popularize them and to help citizens understand their rights and duties.

Our progress over the past three decades in the field of educating the young is one of our most important achievements, and is a constant of our drive to develop our human resources which are a must for the achievement of any progress. Since the first educational reforms, which were introduced in 1956, with the aim of making schooling available to the children of every family throughout the country, irrespective of means,

Tunisia began, in 1991, to set in motion a comprehensive educational reform programme, aimed especially at primary education and compulsory schooling. These efforts have enabled us to reduce adult illiteracy from 85 per cent to 37 per cent. In 1993, the rate of school attendance by those between 6 and 16 years of age reached 82 per cent for girls and 88.7 per cent for boys. In 1994, we launched a special programme to reduce illiteracy among women in the rural areas. It is fair to say that any State that earmarks some 25 per cent of its budget for education and learning will be well placed to cope with the challenges of the future.

In the area of health-care services, our policy recognizes the right of every citizen to health coverage, and our health-care provision is among the best in the world.

Mortality rates decreased from 15 per thousand in 1966 to 6.2 per thousand in 1992. The average rate of infant mortality decreased from 153 per thousand in 1966 to 32 per thousand in 1992.

Such results have been achieved thanks to the expansion of the network of health-care centres throughout our cities, villages and rural areas, side by side with specific programmes aimed at the eradication of epidemic and contagious diseases, the promotion of environmental health, control of the purity of drinking water, reinforcement of school and university medical care, immunization programmes and health care and protection programmes for the elderly and the handicapped.

It is worth mentioning that, in 1994, additional efforts have been made to establish health centres in the remote rural areas and to man them with the necessary staff. Teams of specialist physicians moved to those areas and participated in the provision of health-care services to increasing numbers of our citizens.

The year 1994 has been characterized also by a noticeable reinforcement of the health infrastructure, far-reaching reform of its institutions and the acquisition of modern equipment and instruments to help the health-care sector in Tunisia developing its know-how in various new fields and different medical specializations.

Along with this health-care policy, and proceeding from our awareness that it was necessary to control population growth, in view of the positive returns of such control, we embarked, as early as 1964, on an ambitious family planning and birth-control programme, implemented by The Family and Population National Agency. The competence of this Agency covers the whole country through a wide network of stationary and mobile offices that provide health and educational services, and carry out research.

These programmes have been accompanied by the introduction of appropriate measures, such as allowing the private sector to import contraceptives in 1961, the provision of general social coverage, limiting family allowances to the first three children and the provision, at no cost to the recipients, of a wide range of family-planning services. These measures have led to a rapid increase in the number of people making use of such services, so that the use of contraceptives has risen from 31.4 per cent, in 1978, to 50 per cent at present. The average birth rate fell from 39 per thousand in 1970 to 25 per thousand in 1992, whereas the composite fecundity index fell to 3.2 children, from 7.2 children in 1965.

The year 1994 has witnessed the implementation of a special action programme for the benefit of rural families with the aim of improving the integrated family health approach that deals with family planning as one of the components of comprehensive health care. Human and material resources have been increased in areas still lacking appropriate coverage to promote greater use of contraceptives. Priority has been given to on-site education and to the provision of medical services through mobile clinics. The programme will continue to be implemented over the next few years, till it achieves its health-care and demographic objectives.

I should also mention here that our family policy has focused increasing attention on the needs of women. For example, in addition to all I have referred to, Tunisia has ratified many agreements, of which I may mention the Copenhagen Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The year 1994 has witnessed the implementation of the latter measures in the interest of women. For example, working mothers covered by social security receive additional bonuses to enable them to make use of nurseries for the care of their children. Agreements have been reached also with various national societies to assist such societies in providing new nurseries and improving services therein.

As far as the child is concerned, Tunisia has made available all legal and institutional guarantees and has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. His Excellency the President of the Republic, last August, adopted a decision concerning the re-examination of

divorce conciliation sessions in cases where there are children in the family. Tunisian law provides protection for children exposed to various forms of exploitation in order to shield them from threats and dangers of all kinds. This is done mainly through the strengthening of punishments for those who maltreat, exploit or brutalize a child.

Proceeding from Tunisia's firm belief that there is no dignity for any family which does not earn an appropriate income that would enable it to function properly and protect it from want, we have focused, since independence, on increasing family incomes through job creation schemes of various kinds. For more than three decades now, we have been earmarking no less than 18 per cent of our gross national product for social outlays.

In that way, the State has been able to provide every family with a supplementary income that is equal to the minimum guaranteed wage. This is provided through the compensation fund and the free health care fund, as well as by transport fare subsidies, free education and assistance in kind. Thanks to this policy, we have achieved a great deal, especially at the level of better family incomes, which have been multiplied by 4.3 times over a period of 15 years. This has enabled families to raise their standards of living and poverty, which afflicted 33 per cent of our population in 1967, was reduced to 6.7 per cent in 1990.

On the initiative of His Excellency President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali, a national solidarity fund was created in 1993 to provide for those underprivileged areas and groups that are in need of the basic infrastructure of social services. In 1993 and 1994 alone, some 300,000 citizens have benefited from the fund, through programmes aimed at improving living conditions by providing that basic infrastructure, electricity, drinking water, schools and health centres as well as income-creating opportunities that suit the conditions of each area.

Proceeding from Tunisia's awareness that the availability of housing is a factor of family stability and prosperity and an essential requirement of the family is to focus on performing its functions, we have pursued an ambitious housing policy that embraced the enactment of legislation and the adoption of practical measures, such as the setting up of institutions, with the aim of promoting the housing sector. Special financing mechanisms have been set up for the benefit of low-income families. This policy and the legislative measures accompanying it have led to a reduction in the rate of unsuitable housing from 44 per cent in 1964 to 4.8 per cent in 1980. Today, we can proudly state that 80 per cent of Tunisian families own their own homes.

Social security is the best cover that protects the Tunisian family and forms a good social safety net. The number of people covered by social security increased sevenfold from 1964 to 1991. In 1991, the rate of coverage stood at 62 per cent of the working population. Special attention has been paid also to Tunisian nationals living abroad. This attention has been heightened over the past few years and has led to the creation of a government agency and a supreme council for Tunisians abroad. The aim is to protect the rights of those Tunisian nationals especially after the enactment of the new laws of the united Europe.

During the World Conference on Population and Development, held recently in Cairo, Tunisia called for the convening of a world symposium that would bring together the countries concerned with the issue of immigration to discuss the issues and problems relating to that issue and to find suitable solutions to the difficulties which are now surfacing.

As the family is the fundamental nucleus of any society and its backbone; as it is the yardstick whereby we can gauge any society's adherence to the norms of civilized living; and as it represents one of the most important values and is one of the most solid institutions, we in Tunisia have accorded it a high priority. Despite the profound changes we are going through, we have continued to attach the highest importance to protecting the family. To this end, we have established a new Ministry and a Supreme Council for Women and the Family. Furthermore, the President of the Republic declared 11 December National Family Day, 11 January National Children's Day and 13 August National Women's Day. On those days, we intensify our family-oriented information campaigns with the aim of increasing public awareness of the rights and obligations of the family and of women and children.

The President returned to the Chair.

At the national level, our family policy is in harmony with general international trends. We have been focusing on the link between human rights in general and the rights of special sections of the population, such as women and children. Tunisia is committed to its international agreements relating to the family and the protection of its members. It has ratified, implemented and entrenched international treaties and conventions

adopted in that area. This has been made evident by our participation in international and regional meetings and conferences, where we discussed a whole range of problems relating to the family. In addition, we have participated in all the activities of the International Year of the Family, where we expressed our views and shared our experiences.

We also hosted the United Nations Africa and Western Asia Preparatory Meeting for the International Year of the Family, held from 29 March to 2 April 1993. Many of the conclusions and recommendations adopted at that meeting focused on: First: supporting and protecting the family in order to enable it to perform its social, economic and cultural functions; Second: creating national family commissions and encouraging non-governmental organizations to participate in that effort. Tunisia has put this recommendation into effect by setting up the Supreme Council for Women and the Family; Third: declaring 15 May an International Day of the Family. Tunisia has celebrated that day in the current year by organizing a number of events; Fourth: the convening of an international symposium to evaluate the achievements of the International Year of the Family. This meeting is part of such effort; Fifth: promoting cooperation and the exchange of information between nations; and, Sixth: the creation of an international family centre to monitor the implementation of the various recommendations adopted and evaluate the policies enacted in this area.

In Tunisia, numerous events and activities have taken place in celebration of the International Year of the Family, from 19 June 1994, the starting date of the celebration, as declared by President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali, through the end of September 1994.

We have been actively preparing to participate in the World Conference on Women, to be held in Beijing in June 1995, after having participated very meaningfully in the Cairo Population Conference.

His Excellency President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia is this year's President of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). From the first day of his presidency, he has highlighted — as he did in his speech before the African Heads of State at the African summit held in Tunisia in June 1994 — the importance of human resources, the lot of children and the suffering of many families as a result of various natural disasters and other difficulties affecting some African societies. On this subject he said,

"It is evident that we need to develop our human resources and safeguard the rights of our children in the fields of education, learning and health. Some of our countries have achieved things that deserve to be consolidated and followed up, because in certain parts of our continent our children -victims of war, famine, disease and expulsion — are still suffering. Therefore, we have to mobilize all efforts to rescue those innocent children, because they are the very foundation of any real or lasting development. This is an international obligation that we must fulfil in consonance with our countries' ratification of the International Declaration on the Rights of the Child and the Plan of Action relating to the welfare of the child."

Tunisian non-governmental organizations have taken many decisions and initiatives for the benefit of children and families in Rwanda and Bosnia and Herzegovina to help them surmount the difficulties they are now facing and to provide them with some of their basic needs.

The strategy of Tunisia's policy strikes a balance between, on the one hand, the provision of the required financial means and, on the other, the present and future difficulties which do affect any innovative action. In our strategy we try to analyse all kinds of Tunisian policies in order to meet their needs. However, obstacles presented by the new economic world order and the new directions taken by a number of international organizations concerned with investment in health and social projects, as well as the heavy burden of servicing foreign debts, make it very difficult for developing countries, including middle-income developing countries such as Tunisia, to muster the required financial means to invest in social programmes and projects.

Against this backdrop, I cannot but remind of the appeal President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali made from this very rostrum when he called upon the international community to reschedule the debts of third world countries so that funds could be invested in the future of the family and in various social programmes. Sustainable development can be achieved only through greater solidarity between nations and through a new collective effort, taking into account the interests of all.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.